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ABSTRACT

Introductory Psychology is a multimedia course that may be taken for college credit from the University of Mid-America, which allows the learner to proceed at his own rate, and which encourages a support system of administrators, faculty, and learning center staff to assist the learner in the accomplishment of educational goals. The evaluation plan for the course was designed around two offerings. During the first offering, it was expected that some general indicators of course suitability could be generated; during the second, that more specific aspects of the course would be examined in light of the first findings. Seven broad questions are addressed in this paper: (1) Who enrolled? (2) How did learners evaluate their experience with Introductory Psychology during the course? (3) How well did learners perform on the graded exams and how long did it take them to complete the course? (4) How did learners evaluate their experiences after completing the course? (5) What correlates of learner performance were found for the first offering of Introductory Psychology? (6) What predictions can be made about the course? (7) What improvements are needed for further evaluation? Information about these concerns should be important to several audiences, including course development teams, delivery system personnel, and evaluation specialists. A learner profile is given along with learner responses to unit evaluation forms and test performance. The unit evaluation form is appended. (LBH)

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INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY
(First Offering)

Course Evaluation Report

Office of
Research and Evaluation

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

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August, 1975

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COURSE EVALUATION REPORT
INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY--FIRST OFFERING

Introduction

This report describes a variety of evaluation activities conducted for the first offering of Introductory Psychology, a course delivered through the State University of Nebraska (SUN). SUN, a project of the University of Nebraska, is a nontraditional, open learning program designed to extend postsecondary educational opportunities to persons who find it difficult to access traditional, campus-based programs. The University of Nebraska is one of five institutions currently affiliated with the University of Mid-America (UMA). UMA is a regional consortium of the Universities of Nebraska, Iowa State, Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State, and serves these institutions through three sets of activities: the acquisition and development of courseware for delivery in open learning programs; the planning, development and coordination of systems for the delivery of open learning; and, research and evaluation which helps inform the development of open learning programs. As of Spring 1975, SUN was the only operational delivery system in the UMA consortium.

Introductory Psychology was acquired, in part, from its developers at Communication Research Machines (CRM) and the University of California at San Diego, and adapted by UMA for use in the SUN delivery system. As with other UMA courses, Introductory Psychology is a multimedia course which may be taken for college credit, which allows the learner to proceed at his or her own rate, and which encourages a support system of administrators, faculty and learning center staff to assist the learner in the accomplishment of educational goals.

The evaluation plan for Introductory Psychology was designed around two offerings of the course. During the first offering, it was expected that some

general indicators of course suitability could be generated; during the second offering, it was expected that more specific aspects of the course would be examined in light of the findings from the first offering. This evaluation strategy was selected to gather both comprehensive and focused evaluation data from learners who actually enrolled in the course.

The first offering of Introductory Psychology through SUN began on November 3, 1974. The course included 15 units (modules) of instruction. Each unit of instruction consisted of a set of objectives, a reading assignment from Psychology Today: An Introduction (Del Mar, California: CRM Books, 1972), a 30-minute television program broadcast twice weekly over the statewide Nebraska Educational Television Network, and a newspaper article carried in the Sunday Edition of the Omaha World-Herald, which has statewide distribution and a readership of 282,000. A study guide, included with course materials, was designed to help students coordinate their use of the text material, the television programs, and the newspaper articles. In addition, the study guide contained for each unit a self-check quiz, a list of optional readings, and a description of voluntary learning projects. Five achievement tests were administered in the course, each test covering three units of work. Each of the tests was scored and graded, with the course grade determined by the cumulative score from all five examinations. "Trial tests" were included in the course as a device to help the student assess his or her state of preparation for the graded exams. Items on the trial tests were not duplicated on the graded exams; however, the same body of content was sampled by the trial tests as the corresponding graded exams. Students took the graded exams at a local public library or a SUN learning center near them. In addition to course testing services, learning centers provided students with videotapes of the television programs for their previewing or reviewing, additional textual materials, and counseling

on available educational opportunities. Finally, a toll-free telephone line to SUN administration and course faculty was available to all students enrolled in the course.

The remainder of this paper deals with seven broad questions: (1) Who enrolled as learners in the first offering of Introductory Psychology? (2) How did learners evaluate their experience with Introductory Psychology during the course? (3) How well did learners perform on the graded exams and how long did it take learners to complete the course? (4) How did learners evaluate their experience with Introductory Psychology after completing the course? (5) What correlates of learner performance were found for the first offering of Introductory Psychology? (6) What predictions can be made about Introductory Psychology based on its first offering by SUN? (7) What improvements are needed for the further evaluation of Introductory Psychology, as well as other UNA courses? Information about these concerns should be important to a number of audiences, including course development teams, delivery system personnel, and evaluation specialists.

A Profile of Learners Who Enrolled in Introductory Psychology

Two hundred eighty-seven (287) learners initially enrolled in the first offering of Introductory Psychology. Twenty (20) learners (7%) withdrew from the course during the first eight week refund period. Information collected on the course registration form helps to describe the remaining 267 learners:

- 83% enrolled for credit
- the median age was 39 years, with 50% between 29 and 46 years
- 41% identified themselves as homemakers
- 83% were female
- 34% were from the Omaha learning center area, 31% from the Lincoln learning center area, 26% were from the Kearney learning center area, and 9% were from the Scottsbluff learning center area

* 75% reported that they could reach a SUN learning center
* 21% also enrolled for credit in SUN's Accounting I course
* 4% identified their occupation as 'student'

One hundred ninety-nine (199) learners (75%) completed the Student Information Questionnaire (SIQ). Although numbers of responses varied for each of the SIQ items, the following data were obtained about enrollees:

* 79% were married, 15% were single, and 6% were widowed, separated, or divorced
* 46% had mostly grown children, 37% had mostly young children, and 17% had no children
* 7% had less than a high school education, 48% were high school graduates, 15% had a trade or business school education, 26% had one to three years of a college education, and 4% had a college degree
* 14% had aspirations to obtain an Associate Degree, 31% wanted a Bachelor's Degree, 22% wanted some other degree, and 33% had no degree aspirations
* 85% resided in Nebraska for 11 years or more
* 46% had resided in Nebraska only, while 30% had resided in three or more states
* 25% lived on a farm or ranch, 17% lived in towns under 2,000 persons, 15% lived in towns between 2,000-10,000 persons, 9% lived in towns between 10,000-50,000 persons, and 34% lived in cities of 50,000 or more persons
* 60% had not participated in a formal educational experience within the past five years
* the greatest concern in studying with SUN was "academic and learning problems: starting to study again, new methods, concentration, memory, etc."
* the most important goal, which learners selected from a variety of reasons for studying with SUN, was "simply, to learn"

In summary, those who enrolled in the first offering of Introductory Psychology through SUN tended to be female, married with children, state residents for 11 or more years, and distributed across the state in approximately the distribution of the population, with 75% reporting access to SUN learning centers. A large percentage of the enrollees took the course for credit, wanted

to obtain a college degree of some kind, had not participated in a formal educational experience within the past five years, were in the 29-46 age range, had no previous college or university experience, were concerned about academic and learning problems in starting to study again, and considered "simply, to learn" as a very important goal.

Learner Responses to Unit Evaluation Forms

Learner responses to each of the 15 units of instruction within Introductory Psychology were sampled in the following manner:

> Unit evaluation forms were inserted within the study guide such that each learner was given the opportunity to rate six of the fifteen units. Three groups of approximately 90 learners each were randomly assigned units to evaluate: Group A rated Units 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 15; Group B rated Units 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; Group C rated Units 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. The design of the evaluation permitted all units to be rated as well as some overlap of unit evaluations between groups. The overlapping feature was included to check the comparability of group ratings for Units 3, 8, and 13.

Over all 15 units, 454 (28%) of the evaluation forms were returned. The rate of unit evaluation form return decreased over the 15 units, from 59% for Unit 1 to 24% for Unit 8 to 10% for Unit 15. All returns were on a voluntary basis and therefore represent a self-selection bias. However, the comparison of group responses to Units 3, 8, and 13 showed no significant statistical differences between group responses. All forms were returned anonymously.

The chart in Appendix A summarizes the data obtained for all unit evaluation forms completed by learners <u>during</u> the course. In general terms, and considering all unit evaluation forms returned, learners tended to rate the units as very good, reasonably clear in content, somewhat fast in pace, somewhat difficult, and fairly interesting. A majority of the learners spent six or less hours per unit, reported learning a great deal, considered what they had learned as important, and felt the amount of work was just about right. In a comparative view across all units, learners considered the text to be the <u>most helpful</u>

learning resource, followed by the study guide, the toll-free telephone line, the learning centers, the television, optional readings, and the newspaper. The study guide was the most frequently used learning resource, followed by the newspaper, television, text, toll-free telephone line, learning centers, and the optional readings.

The overall rating (excellent to poor) for each instructional unit appears to be highly, positively and significantly ($p \leq .001$) related to the level of interest the units builds ($r=.72$), the amount learned from the unit as reported by the learner ($r=.56$), the clarity of content in the unit ($r=.51$), the importance attached by the learner to what is learned ($r=.48$), and the helpfulness to the learner of the newspaper component ($r=.24$), the television segments ($r=.29$), the text ($r=.25$), and the study guide ($r=.20$).

Course Completion and Test Performance

At the end of the eight-week refund period, 220 learners remained enrolled in Introductory Psychology for credit, a total of 47 were enrolled for non-credit, and 20 persons had withdrawn. Of the 220 learners enrolled for credit, 106 (48%) completed the course by May 31, 1975; 71(32%) had been in contact with the faculty to extend their work in the course beyond May 31, 1975; 38(17%) changed to non-credit statues; 2(1%) had completed four of the five exams, but had not been in contact with the faculty; 2(%) had withdrawn from the course after the initial eight-week period; and, 1(½%) could not be located by the course faculty. One of the learners, who originally enrolled for non-credit, changed to credit status and completed the course. It is not known to what extent the remaining 46 non-credit enrollees "completed" the course, because they did not take course exams.

Two sets of performance data, exam scores and time between course exams, were available for each learner who completed the course by May 31, 1975. The

average (mean) time to complete all five examinations was 144 days, with a range of 96 to 204 days. The distribution of exam completion data follows:

Time Element	Range	Median	Mean	s.d.
Days between Unit 3 television broadcast (11-18-74) and Exam 1	2-70	8	12	12
Days between Exam 1 and Exam 2	8-89	29	35	18
Days between Exam 2 and Exam 3	9-121	40	44	22
Days between Exam 3 and Exam 4	2-90	22	27	14
Days between Exam 4 and Exam 5	3-98	23	26	16

The pattern of test-taking behavior varied considerably among those who took the course for credit and completed it. It appears, however, that the time elapsed between the Unit 3 television broadcast and taking Exam 1 is the earliest, significant predictor ($r=.50$, $p \leq .001$) of the total number of days learners take to finish the course. It also appears that many who delayed in taking Exam 1 and Exam 2 later caught up with the average rate of test taking during Exams 4 and 5.

The total possible score on all five course exams was 247, with each exam consisting of approximately 50 multiple-choice items. The average (mean) total score was 189, with a range of 91 to 234. The distribution of exam score data follows:

Exam	Possible Score	Range	Median	Mean	s.d.
1 (Units 1-3)	48	11-46	37	36	6
2 (Units 4-6)	51	26-50	42	41	5
3 (Units 7-9)	50	14-45	33	33	7
4 (Units 10-12)	50	16-49	40	39	6
5 (Units 13-15)	48	15-48	40	40	6

For the 107 individuals who finished the course by May 31, 1975, all exam scores were highly and positively correlated with each other (r's from .69 to .81). This finding suggests that the individual learner's performance tended to be stable across the five exams.

Learner Responses to End-of-Course Evaluation Forms

Following completion of Exam 5, and prior to receiving a course grade, learners received an end-of-course evaluation form. Seventy-five (75) of the 107 learners (70%) who completed the course by May 31, 1975, returned end-of-course evaluation forms. The chart in Appendix B summarizes some of the post-course evaluation data obtained from learners.

In sweeping general terms, Introductory Psychology was rated as an excellent, interesting, but difficult course, producing more personal confidence and instrumental in attaining personal goals. About 43% felt there was too much learner responsibility, with "lack of personal contact with teachers" ranking high in the list of course difficulties. This argues for more frequent faculty and/or staff intervention. The single most important course difficulty was acquiring the necessary academic skills to achieve in the course. Approximately 91% reported the television programs as pleasurable, and 60% of those who completed the course found the weekly television broadcasts helpful for pacing their study. The exams were rated as the right number, right length, right difficulty and fairness; apparently not being a problem in the course. The most important components in the course were the text, study guide, television, newspaper articles, learning centers, and WATS line in that order, with 95% finding the trial tests helpful in preparing for exams.

Correlates of Learner Performance

An extensive set of data was collected from learners who enrolled in the first offering of Introductory Psychology. This data included personal

characteristics of learners prior to the start of the course (registration form and SIQ data), unit evaluations completed by learners during the course (unit evaluation form data), learner achievement test and course completion data, and learner post-course evaluations (end-of-course evaluation form data). Given all of this data, representing over 100 variables, what can be concluded about learner performance in the course?

Two indicators of learner performance in Introductory Psychology were course exam scores and exam completion dates. Based on a correlation analysis of the data, it was found that:

* the total time taken by learners to complete the course was not significantly related to their total exam score, the time taken by learners between course exams was not significantly related to their subsequent exam score, and an exam score was not significantly related to the subsequent length of time between exams.

* the total score obtained by learners on the five course exams was significantly related to the learners' educational level, overall course rating, reported difficulty level of the course, years since last participation in a formal educational experience, and age; total exam score was not significantly related to the learners' reported interest level of the course, responsibility placed on the learner, or access to learning centers.

* the time taken to complete course exams was not significantly related to the learners' educational level, years since last formal educational experience, overall course rating, reported interest level of course, reported responsibility placed on learner, reported level of course difficulty, age, or reported access to learning centers.

Those who completed the course by May 31, 1975, (N=107) were found to be not significantly different from all course enrollees (N=267) on any of the following additional characteristics: previous college or university experience, sex, marital and family status, degree aspirations, learning center area, occupational category, number of hours working per week, satisfaction level with present job, years resided in Nebraska, size of community resided in, or the educational level of father, mother, or spouse.

Hypotheses Generated from the First Offering of Introductory Psychology

Based on the evidence gathered from learners in the evaluation of Introductory Psychology during its first offering by SUN, the following hypotheses (or predictions) are submitted for verification.

1. Learners proceed at various rates through the course, and time taken to complete the course is not significantly related to achievement exam scores.

2. Achievement exam scores tend to be higher for learners who are relatively younger, who have participated in a formal educational experience relatively more recently, who give the course a high overall rating, who report a relatively lower level of course difficulty, and who have obtained a relatively higher level of education; reported interest level of the course, responsibility placed on the learner, or access to learning centers do not affect achievement exam scores in the course.

3. Learners who give a high overall rating (excellent to poor) for an instructional unit of the course also tend to rate highly the interest level of the unit, the clarity of content in the unit, the amount learned from the unit, the importance of what was learned from the unit, and the helpfulness of the learning resources employed in the unit.

4. Both during and after the course, learners rate the text and study guide as the most helpful learning resources in the course; for those taking and completing the course for credit, the trial tests are also rated extremely helpful.

5. Most learners do not frequently use the toll-free telephone line or the learning centers for course-related concerns; however, those learners who do use these resources find them to be helpful in their coursework.

6. The television and newspaper components of the course are frequently used by learners, but are found to be less helpful than the text and study guide.

7. The television broadcast schedule serves as a pacer for about 60% of the learners who complete the course, and most learners find the television segments pleasurable.

8. Both before and after the course, learners consider academic and learning problems a major concern in affecting their performance.

9. About 50% of all learners who enroll in the course for credit will complete the course within 30 weeks; an additional 30% will make contracts to complete the course.

10. Learners who take and complete the course for credit will have more confidence in their own ability and will significantly further their personal goals.

Improvements Needed in Further Course Evaluations

From the evidence collected by the instruments and procedures used in the learner evaluations of Introductory Psychology during its first offering, it is difficult to make specific recommendations for course improvement. However, for many learners, the course appears to be rigorous and fast-paced; more frequent contact among learners, faculty, and learning center staff would be desirable.

Specific data were not collected to identify the relative contribution of each instructional unit or each learning resource toward fulfilling the course objectives. In addition, we did not identify such things as: the order of resources used in each unit; the adequacy of directions given in the study guide; the frequency and nature of contacts which learners made with course faculty, learning center staff, and other students; the usefulness of illustrations used in the course text; the perceived and desired relationships between the text and television components; information which learners could have used but did not obtain; or, a specific change which learners would make to an instructional unit. These items, as well as others, will be included in the unit evaluations of Introductory Psychology during its second offering. Such data should help to identify specific inadequacies which might exist in the course and which could be considered in revision of the course.

A second area of improvement needed in course evaluation is methodological. We do not know to what extent a self-selection bias in our reporting sample affected the results obtained, and, therefore, affected the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, we did not have the capability to identify individual responses, and therefore individual differences, for unit evaluation forms. A third methodological improvement needed is to know more precisely what properties the scales on evaluation instruments are measuring, and how reliably we are measuring those properties. For example, achievement test scores are significantly correlated with overall course ratings, which in turn are highly

and positively related to level of course interest and course difficulty. The concept of overall course rating, as well as course interest and difficulty, needs to be defined more carefully. Finally, we need to find more efficient ways for both managing and massaging multivariate data sets.

In addition to testing the hypotheses which have been presented in this paper, it would be important to know: (a) What happened to non-credit enrollees? Did they finish the course? Were they satisfied with their progress? (b) What are the reasons for withdrawal or change of status for credit enrollees? (c) Do learners who enroll in Introductory Psychology also enroll in subsequent courses offered by SUN, as well as other educational programs? (d) Do those learners who have access to learning centers actually use the services offered there, how frequently, and for what purposes? (e) Do the trial tests actually predict the learners' performance on the graded examinations? (f) Who learned what from the public, no-cost course components (television and newspaper), and how many were stimulated to engage in formal education or more seriously continue informal education? Many of these questions are germane to an evaluation of not only Introductory Psychology, but other UMA courses as well.

INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY
Learner Responses to Unit Evaluation
Forms for All Units*

Questions	Mean Response	$\bar{x}$	s.d.
1. Overall, how would you rate this unit? (N=453)	(1) Excellent — (2) Very Good — (3) Good — (4) Fair — (5) Poor	2.21	0.92
2. How would you rate the overall clarity of the content? (N=453)	Exceptionally Clear — Very Clear — Reasonable Clear — Unclear — Very Unclear	2.63	0.75
3. How did you find the overall pacing of the materials? (N=452)	Too Fast — Somewhat Fast — Just Right — Somewhat Fast — Too Slow	2.35	0.75
4. The material in this unit is: (N=453)	Very Difficult — Somewhat Difficult — Just Right — Somewhat Easy — Very Easy	2.18	0.71
5. How interesting is this unit? (N=454)	Very Interesting — Fairly Interesting — Neutral — Not Very Interesting — Boring	1.71	0.86
6. How many hours did you spend on this Unit (including TV presentation)? (N=452)	1-3 hrs. — 4-6 hrs. — 7-9 hrs. — 10-12 hrs. — 13-15 hrs. — Over 15 hrs.	2.76	1.42
7. I learned: (N=452)	A Great Deal — Some — Not Much — Nothing	1.44	0.56
8. What I learned is: (N=452)	Very Important — Important — Generally Unimportant — A Waste	1.83	0.52
9. Total amount of work is: (N=435)	Too Much — Just Right — Too Little	1.70	0.47

10. How helpful did you find the resources used in this unit?

Resource	N	(1) Very Helpful — (2) Helpful — (3) Not Helpful	$\bar{x}$	s.d.
a. Newspaper	428		1.86	0.64
b. Television	414		1.81	0.67
c. Text	380		1.37	0.49
d. Additional Readings	030		1.83	0.65
e. Study Guide	436		1.46	0.52
f. Learning Center	076		1.68	0.52
g. Toll-free Telephone	080		1.61	0.52

* A total of 454 Unit Evaluation Forms were returned. Introductory Psychology consisted of 15 units.

Appendix B

INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY

Learner Responses to a Sample of End-of-Course Evaluation Form Items*

Questions	Mean Response (Frequency of Response)
1. Overall, how would you rate this course? (N=75; $\bar{x}$=1.49; s.d.=.55)	(1) Excellent (40) · (2) Good (33) · (3) Fair (2) · (4) Poor (0) · (5) Unsatisfactory (0)
2. How interesting was this course to you? (N=75; $\bar{x}$=1.35; s.d.=.53)	Very Interesting (51) · Fairly Interesting (22) · Neutral (2) · Rather Uninteresting (0) · Very Uninteresting (0)
3. This course places the responsibility for learning on the student: (N=74; $\bar{x}$=2.57; s.d.=.55)	Much Too Heavily (1) · A Little Too Heavily (31) · About the Right Amount (41) · Not Quite Enough (1) · Much Too Lightly (0)
4. Overall, how difficult was this course for you? (N=75; $\bar{x}$=2.04; s.d.=.63)	Very Difficult (10) · Fairly Difficult (55) · Neutral (7) · Fairly Easy (3) · Very Easy (0)
5. Principal items listed by learners as contributing to course difficulty. (Number listing item in parentheses)	a. Academic and learning problems: starting to study again, new methods, concentration, memory, etc. (35) b. Lack of personal contact with teachers (28) c. Domestic interruptions and demands (26) d. Work pressures and responsibilities (25) e. Self-discipline: getting down to regular work (25) f. Lack of personal contact with other students (16)
6. How pleasurable for you were the television programs in this course? (N=74; $\bar{x}$=1.69; s.d.=.64)	Very Pleasurable (30) · Somewhat Pleasurable (37) · Not Pleasurable (7)
7. Did you find the weekly television broadcast helpful in pacing your study? (N=72)	Yes 43 · No 29
8. Did you follow the sequence of lesson activities recommended in the study guide? (N=74; $\bar{x}$=1.28; s.d.=.51)	Almost Always (55) · Sometimes (17) · Almost Never (2)
9. "In terms of my own ability, as a result of taking the SUN course: (N=75; $\bar{x}$=1.37; s.d.=.61)	I have more confidence." (52) · I have the same confidence." (18) · I have less confidence." (5)
10. Have your personal goals been significantly furthered through taking this course? (N=75)	Yes 41 · Somewhat 29 · No 5

*A total of 75 End-of-Course Evaluation Forms were returned from 107 persons completing Introductory Psychology as of May 31, 1975.